Urban Rivers Restoration Initiative

July 2003

In July 2002, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to facilitate cooperation between the two agencies to address critical water quality issues and economic revitalization and public use and enjoyment of urban rivers. As part of the MOU, the two agencies agreed to designate eight (8) demonstration pilot projects for the purpose of coordinating the planning and execution of urban river cleanup and restoration.

While there is no direct authorization or appropriation for this Initiative, it encourages the two agencies to coordinate existing Congressionally authorized and appropriated activities and does not seek new monies under the auspices of urban rivers restoration. An Urban Rivers pilot designation will bring about increased coordination and cooperation between the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to focus on restoring degraded urban rivers, will help to increase efficiency of Agency plans and programs, will facilitate coordinated delivery of federal services, and will coordinate remedial, water quality, and environmental restoration activities under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), Resources Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), Clean Water Act (CWA), and various Water Resources Development Acts (WRDA).

The EPA has programs uniquely designed to address river sediment contamination through a variety of environmental programs in the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response and various programs in the Office of Water. Likewise, the US Army Corps of Engineers is involved with numerous river related activities, including operation and maintenance of navigation channels and harbors, flood control and ecosystem restoration.

The first four pilots – the Anacostia River (Washington, DC and Maryland), Blackstone/Woonasquatucket Rivers (Rhode Island and Massachusetts), Elizabeth River (Virginia) and Tres Rios (Arizona) were announced in April 2003.

The second four rivers selected under this Initiative are:

Passaic River includes a 17 mile stretch beginning at Dundee Dam in Garfield and extending to the mouth of Newark Bay. The watershed consists of approximately 173 square miles located in the highly urbanized areas of northeastern New Jersey, including Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Passaic Counties. This urban rivers pilot will emphasize partnerships among many organizations striving to improve

sediment and water quality. The pilot proposes to conduct a comprehensive study of the Lower Passaic River to determine an appropriate remediation and restoration plan for the river. The study will be coordinated among the Corps, EPA, State of New Jersey and private and local authorities. In the longer term, this will lead to the restoration of benthic and aquatic habitat by remediating contaminated sediments and addressing combined sewer outfalls (CSOs), surface runoff and nonpoint source pollution and increase public and private participation and stewardship.

Gowanus Canal and Bay includes approximately 130 acres of open water between Bay Ridge Channel in the Upper Bay of New York Harbor and the beginning of the Canal. The watershed is a highly developed urban area totally located in the Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York. This urban rivers pilot project will promote collaboration within the watershed between business and non-profit community and will advance pollution prevention, water quality improvements, restoration of wildlife habitat and address impacts from combined sewer outfalls (CSOs) and sewage treatment plants, clean up and reduce contaminated sediments.

Fourche Creek is located within an EPA Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot in Pulaski County and lies within a HUD/USDA Empowerment Zone. Fourche Creek has a large drainage basin or watershed of 108,8000 acres. The creek flows generally from west to east into the Arkansas River. The runoff from the watershed flows into Fourche Creek and its tributaries. Fourche Bottoms is located towards the downstream end of Fourche Creek. At the upstream
end of the bottoms, Fourche Creek enters the bottoms from the southwest and Rock Creek enters from the northwest and ends where the two creeks join. Fourche Creek threads its way though the bottoms with several channels and rejoins itself before leaving the bottoms. The bottoms are about 3,500 acres of which the Corps proposed and Congress authorized to acquire 1,750 acres for environmental restoration. The bottoms store flood waters until it flows downstream into the channelized Fourche Creek. Fourche Creek drains most of the city of Little Rock; a small portion of western Little Rock drains into the Arkansas River.This urban rivers pilot project will promote collaboration with the watershed business community to reduce non-point source pollution, restore wetland functions and reduce flooding and educate the public on ecosystem systems restoration and sustainable growth.

City Creek flows through Salt Lake City's gateway district, which is an EPA Brownfields Assessment Demonstration pilot and has been designated a Showcase Community. The restored creek will lie between a 650-acre EPA Brownfields Showcase Redevelopment project known as "The Gateway" on the east and the Jordan River on the west. The new trails along the restored creek will connect the Gateway Development to a trail system that runs along the valley-wide Bonneville Shoreline. Although the Creek Plan is primarily for the restoration of an ecological system, the maintenance road and trail will have nodes along the creek that will allow for recreational use and ecological education for elementary and high schools. This urban rivers pilot project will promote partnerships with many organizations for the restoration of a riparian ecosystem, ecological enhancements, riparian habitat, and recreational use. Additionally, this pilot project will daylight and otherwise restore an ecosystem that was completely eliminated in 1910 when 2 miles of City Creek were encased below North Temple Street in the central portion of Salt Lake City.

EPA plans, for each pilot project, to allocate $50,000 to its Regional Offices to support restoration of degraded urban rivers.

For more information on the MOU and the Urban Rivers Restoration Initiative, visit http://www.epa.gov/oswer/landrevitalization/urbanrivers